

Ulysses S. Grant, an American General

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Although Ulysses S. Grant was not seen as a successful president, he has gone down as one of the most memorable generals in United States history. He had many faces. Grant was the son of a tanner, a scrawny young boy. He was the eighteenth President of the United States. Most importantly he was a successful military leader, and patriotic American.

Hiram Ulysses Grant was born in Point Pleasant, Ohio on April 27, 1822, to parents Jesse Root, and Hannah Simpson Grant. A year later the family moved to Georgetown, Ohio, to live what Grant would describe as an “uneventful life.” He was not studiously inclined, but did well enough in school to get by. Grant was considered a small scrawny boy, but he had an inexplicable connection with horses. He could handle even the most difficult horse with ease. Ulysses hated the killing of animals, the horror of game hunting, and especially hated the tannery which his father ran.

When it came time for Ulysses to attend a higher education facility the cost of college was staggering to his thrifty father. Jesse soon found a way to pay for education for his son. Ulysses would enroll in the United States Military Academy at West Point. Grant was ill prepared for a military life, and had never planned to pursue a military career. At home he had never needed to fold his clothes or make his own bed. Grant was quoted as saying, “A military life had no charm for me.”

After graduation from the academy, Grant was sent to Jefferson Barracks, in St. Louis. There he met Julia Dent and married her in 1848. The first time Grant was sent into battle was in the Mexican War. Grant thought the war to be “wicked.” He once said, “I do not think there was ever a more wicked war than that waged by the United States on Mexico It was on our part most unjust”. Although he did not agree with the war, he fought because he believed that his “supreme duty was to my flag.” Among things he learned in the Mexican War, perhaps the most important and long lasting knowledge he gained was of the different command personalities and the individual qualities of officers.

By the time the Civil War broke out Grant and his family were living in Galena, Illinois. Ulysses was appointed to command an “unruly” volunteer regiment. By September, 1861 Grant had gotten his regiment to shape up and had risen to the rank of brigadier general of volunteers. His strategy was to win control of the Mississippi Valley. In February, 1862 he took Fort Henry and had attacked Fort Donelson. When a Confederate general asked for terms, Grant replied, “No terms except on unconditional and immediate surrender can be expected.”

The Battle of Shiloh was one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War and did not come out well for Grant and his army. People were demanding that he be removed. President Lincoln responded by saying, “I can’t spare the man—he fights.” After the embarrassment of Shiloh, Grant successfully maneuvered and skillfully fought to gain Vicksburg. In winning Vicksburg, the key to the Mississippi, General Grant split the Confederacy in half.

General Grant negotiated the end of the Civil war in the Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865. As Grant left that legendary courthouse the federal soldiers roared with cheers of exultation. The general silenced them say, “The war is over. The Rebels are our countrymen again.”

General Ulysses S. Grant was not known to have been an outstanding president. He was described in his youth as an “unpromising boy.” Even though Grant had never intended to live a military life, he was one of the most memorable generals in United States history. His impact on the outcome of the war was great and his impact on the history of America was perhaps greater. Grant at one point described his life as “uneventful,” but it is clear that his life was indeed full of adventure. [From F. Norton Boothe, *Great American Generals, Ulysses S. Grant*; General Sir James Marshall Cornwall, *Grant as Military Commander* ; “Ulysses S. Grant”, Biography. www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/us18.html (Sept. 28, 2004).]